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## Is There One Best 'Model of Democracy'?

Efficiency and Representativeness: 'Theoretical Revolution' or Democratic Dilemma?

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**Abstract:** One element in the choice of a constitutional design or model of democracy is the criterion of efficiency. Different political scientists, however, understand the word 'efficiency' in different ways. The author suggests a distinction between its two main meanings: (1) efficiency-action capacity and (2) effectiveness-socio-economic performance. It is not just socio-economic effectiveness that is important, but also political efficiency-action capacity. Efficiency-action capacity is closely linked with the theory of democracy put forward by Schumpeter and adopted by the majority of political scientists today. Thus efficiency is essential not only for the government (in that it simplifies the operation of power) but also, and even more importantly, for the governed, for the citizens (in that it simplifies the choice and peaceful removal of the rulers, i.e. the executive).

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"The problem then is always to find the form most appropriate to the circumstances. Reasonable people may disagree on what is most appropriate in particular circumstances. But so long as they agree that no one form is suitable for all circumstances they stand some chance of finding a form of authority suitable for the particular circumstances." [Dahl 1990: 75]

### Introduction

The recent third wave of democratisation has forced – or at least encouraged – political scientists to deeper investigations of both constitutional choices (a majoritarian electoral system or proportional representation, parliamentary government or presidential government, etc.) and of more general questions such as what model of democracy (e.g. majoritarian or consensual) should be recommended for countries in the process of democratisation [see e.g. Lijphart 1991a, 1992a, 1992b, 1994c: 151-152]. Some political scientists, including Juan J. Linz [1990], recommend parliamentary rather than presidential government, while Arend Lijphart opts for the consensus model of democracy rather

\*) This article is a fully reworked version of my article published in French in the *Revue internationale de politique comparée* in 1996 [see Novák 1996]. After my French article was published, various other texts appeared on the problem [e.g. Lijphart 1997, Crepaz 1996 and Kaiser 1997]. In addition I discovered the important work of Giovanni Sartori [1994c] and some other unpublished manuscripts of his [Sartori 1995, 1996]. I would also like to thank all those who sent me their written comments on my earlier article (particularly Yves Schemeil), and those who sent me their texts. I would also like to thank both anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments.

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than the majoritarian one, etc.. This article is primarily, although not exclusively, concerned with models of democracy (and in this context particularly electoral systems) and in conclusion looks at the application of the alternatives discussed in three post-communist countries of East Central Europe (Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic).<sup>1</sup>

One of the elements in the choice of a constitutional design or model of democracy is the criterion of efficiency. Different political scientists, however, understand the word 'efficiency' in different ways. The definition most commonly given in political science literature is action capacity, the capacity to act. A government is efficient in so far as it has a free hand in pursuing its policies. A second meaning of the term (effectiveness) concerns the capacity to achieve the government's socio-economic aims. In this article the first meaning, i.e. action capacity, is generally used.<sup>2</sup>

The relevant literature sometimes moves backwards and forwards between the two meanings of efficiency, almost without noticing, which in no way contributes to the clarity of the debate. There is no essential relationship between these two meanings: a government may have free reign in pursuing its policy and still achieve unsatisfactory results, while a government that is lacking in action capacity can be successful in economic or other terms.

#### **Socio-economic Performance and Legitimacy in East Central Europe**

The well-known sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset defined the concept of effectiveness in socio-economic rather than political terms: "Effectiveness means actual performance, the extent to which the system satisfies the basic functions of government as most of the population and powerful groups within it as big business or the armed forces see them" [Lipset 1981: 64]. Socio-economic effectiveness is basically the same as what Jan-Erik Lane and Svante Ersson term "state performance" [Lane and Ersson 1996], in which they include particularly civil and political rights, welfare spending, income equality, human development and the level of inflation.

As is well known, Lipset placed (socio-economic) *effectiveness* on a level with *legitimacy*. Long term effectiveness, for example, can to some extent compensate for insufficient legitimacy. Strong legitimacy can also compensate for insufficient effectiveness for a certain period of time (as was the case in the first years after the fall of the communist regimes in East Central Europe). If, however, socio-economic ineffectiveness lasts too long, even the highest political legitimacy cannot make up for it. "While effectiveness is primarily instrumental, legitimacy is evaluative", notes Lipset [1981: 64].

For the countries of East Central Europe the economic and political transitions are typically parallel.<sup>3</sup> The problem lies basically in the fact that the economic transition (the

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<sup>1</sup>) A useful introduction to the issues of politics in the post-communist countries of East Central Europe was recently published by Keith Crawford [1996].

<sup>2</sup>) As I noted in my earlier article [Novák 1996: 690-692], the great American theorist of democracy Robert A. Dahl suggested a distinction between individual effectiveness and collective effectiveness [Dahl 1970, 1990: 77] and in one of his more recent articles [Dahl 1994] he developed this thesis and used it explain the resistance in particularly the smaller countries seeking membership of the European Union. See also Bilohradský [1994].

<sup>3</sup>) Grzegorz Ekiert [1991: 310-311] noted on this point: "Thus the transition process in East Central Europe implies a parallel effort to establish new democratic institutions and to convert centrally planned and state-owned economies into free market economies. The interaction between

spread of the market economy) cannot be as fast or as far-reaching as the political transition (the move to democracy).<sup>4</sup> In Lipset's terminology, this problem can be seen as a relationship between strong (democratic) legitimacy and weaker (socio-economic) effectiveness.

Lipset's affirmation that "what they need above all is efficacy, particularly in the economic arena, but also in the polity" [Lipset, Seong et al. 1993: 171], would meet with almost universal agreement. A far more problematic issue – and yet one on which Lijphart rests his hopes – is whether the change in constitutional solutions (particularly the replacement of a majoritarian voting system by proportional representation) will mean an increase in socio-economic effectiveness.

It should perhaps be said that *it is not just socio-economic effectiveness that is important, but also political efficiency-action capacity*. One clear advantage of political efficiency-action capacity is that it is easier to achieve than socio-economic effectiveness (as for example in certain relatively predictable circumstances the move from proportional representation to a majoritarian voting system could mean a fundamental rise in political efficiency-action capacity). Moreover, political efficiency is fundamental to democracy as we conceive it today, and so should be rejected only in exceptional circumstances (when the very survival of democracy is in question).<sup>5</sup>

#### **What Is and What Is Not Efficiency, and What is it Good For?**

The first question is what efficiency-action capacity is not. The Russian logician and writer Alexandr Zinoviev suggested making a distinction between negative destructive power and positive creative power. He pointed out that communist power is at one and the same time all-powerful and powerless. It is an exceptionally destructive but only a minimally creative force.<sup>6</sup>

The German liberal economist Wilhelm Röpke, who was one of those who propagated the term "a third way" as far back as the 1930s (which would surprise those Czech

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the democratisation of the polity and the marketisation of the economy presents a specific problem and creates an additional dimension of conflicts and tensions which are largely absent in classical transitions from authoritarian regimes."

However as Giuseppe Di Palma, in particular, well understood, this does not mean that this has only negative aspects: "The conventional argument is that because in Eastern Europe we have not only a political transition but also a socioeconomic one, this double feat is especially difficult. We may as well argue the opposite. It is precisely the close and unprecedented connection between a political and a socioeconomic transition that, instead of jeopardizing both, may help the latter ride piggyback on the former." [Di Palma 1991: 29]

<sup>4</sup>) This contrast between the speed of democratisation and the slow introduction of the market economy has been stressed by Jacques Rupnik in particular [1993: 406].

<sup>5</sup>) Here it is necessary to consider the first meaning of efficiency.

<sup>6</sup>) "Ибанская власть всеильна, и вместе с тем, бессильна. Она всеильна негативно, т.е. по возможностям безнаказанно делать зло. Она бессильна позитивно, т.е. по возможностям безвозмездно делать добро. Она имеет огромную разрушительную и ничтожную созидательную силу." [Zinoviev 1976a: 330]. The entire idea behind his novel *Zijajušèje vysoty* is expressed in Zinoviev's non-literary work, where "communist" power takes the place of the "ibanskíe" one [Zinoviev 1983: 204]. The same question was considered by Jon Elster [1980] in his 'paper' presented to the world congress of the International Political Science Association in Moscow in 1979, despite some disagreement on the part of the Soviet hosts.

liberals who support the market economy ‘without adjectives’), distinguished between the “really strong state” and the “activist state” [Röpke 1943, 1962]. The really strong state is “a state which is able to set precise limits on those areas which it is interested in and which is able to use all its powers to enforce its authority within these areas, but avoids any intervention outside them” [Röpke 1962: 217-218]. A really strong state has the courage to govern but does not intervene in everything and does not want to control everything, while an “activist” state is ultimately only prey to special interests [Röpke 1962: 217]. Sartori echoed this to some degree recently when he noted that “effective government” should not be confused with “activist government”.<sup>7</sup> The latter should be rejected while we should support the former.

Sartori [1987: 122] also warned that a reduction in the power of the rulers does not necessarily mean more power for the ruled, but that it may be a game in which both sides, i.e. the rulers and the ruled, lose. If the power of the government is too limited this may become “an evil which affects the whole life of the collectivity” (“*un mal qui corrompt toute la vie collective*”) [Duverger 1988b: 90]. It is a question of overload and ungovernability [see e.g. Crozier, Huntington et al. 1975, Rose 1980 and Dahrendorf 1980].

To turn now to the question of what efficiency-action capacity is, efficiency is closely linked with democracy. It is important not only for the rulers (in that it eases the wielding of power), but also and primarily for the ruled, for citizens (for whom it makes it easier to choose – and peacefully remove – the rulers, i.e. the executives).

In his classic work *The English Constitution*, first published in 1867 (!), Walter Bagehot used efficiency in its first meaning (as political action-capacity) when he described the practical fusion of the executive and the legislature as the “secret” of the efficiency of the English political system: “The efficient secret of the English Constitution may be described as the close union, the nearly complete fusion, of the executive and legislative powers.” [Bagehot 1963: 65]. The term efficiency has been used in a similar way by such scholars as Gary Cox [1987], Matthew S. Shugart and John M. Carey [Shugart and Carey 1992], Raymond Aron [1960, 1965], Maurice Duverger [1982 and 1988b] and Giovanni Sartori [1968, 1994c].

Shugart and Carey [1992: 7-8] explain that “‘Efficiency’ refers to the ability of elections to serve as a means for voters to identify and choose among the competing government options available to them.” It is therefore clear that efficiency “is closely related to identifiability – the ability of voters to identify the choices of competing potential governments that are being presented to them in electoral campaigns” [Shugart and Carey 1992: 8-9].

Therefore, in elections voters (citizens) must be able to either express their support for the existing government or to remove it and replace it with another one. This assumes that there is a reasonably clear difference between the government and the opposition (although there should not be too great an ideological divide). The opposition is concentrated or at least clearly identifiable. For example, in a two-party system, the opposition is almost ‘monopolised’ by the party which lost the election, just as government is concentrated in the hands of the party which won. A similar situation exists in what Duverger termed apparent – or bipolar – multipartism (which he includes among the “dualistic sys-

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<sup>7</sup>) “The former is a government that has the capacity of implementing the policies that it pursues; but it may expound a non-activist philosophy of government and therefore choose, whenever it so decides, to remain inactive.” [Sartori 1994c: 112]

tems”<sup>8</sup>); Sartori [1976] calls this “moderate multipartism or limited pluralism”, i.e. bipolar shifts among coalition governments.

Elections in bipolar systems are therefore really decisive. This assumes that there is a real competition which calls for a sufficient level of consensus. The ideological distance between the relevant political parties must not be too great. Voters must be distributed around the centre, as in the normal bell-shaped curve. In other words, public opinion must have a largely unimodal structure [see Dahl 1965].

These wider connections should be borne in mind. It is not simply a case of whether a democratic government is capable of acting or not (even if it is very important, particularly for those countries in the throes of both political and economic transformation, which is the case particularly of the countries of East Central Europe).<sup>9</sup> The very concept of democracy is of primary importance here, the concept of democracy itself and more precisely what Joseph A. Schumpeter [1962] called “another theory of democracy” (as opposed to the “classical doctrine of democracy”).

Schumpeter gave pride of place to the citizen-voter’s function of producing (or giving birth to) the government – whether directly or indirectly,<sup>10</sup> a function which implicitly includes the possibility of recalling that government.<sup>11</sup> At the end of each term in office the rulers must submit themselves to the verdict of the citizens as expressed in free and

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<sup>8</sup>) “*Si deux grandes coalitions permanentes se forment, qui présentent aux électeurs un programme commun et agissent de concert au Parlement, on est très proche des conditions de fonctionnement du bipartisme. Sous l'apparence extérieure d'un multipartisme, on trouve en réalité un dualisme profond*” [Duverger 1988a: 141].

<sup>9</sup>) Some people object that the post-communist political systems need a broad consensus and that a broad (rather than minimal) coalition is the best adapted to this. This is however a misunderstanding. (1) a broad coalition is needed in the initial phase of the post-communist transition when communist power is still a dangerous opponent. In later phases, however, a minimal winning coalition which can more easily carry out the necessary fundamental changes is more appropriate. (2) As Sartori [1994c] and Duverger [1982, 1988b] in particular showed, consensus is necessary for any democracy to function well, not just “consensus” but also “majoritarian” democracy. “Lijphart underestimated the fact that a minimum of consensus is vital to both types of democratic systems.” [Kaiser 1997: 433] Here I would like to refer to the conclusion of my guide to party systems [see Novák 1997a], where I point out that supporters of both models allow for consensus and centre. In majoritarian democracy a minimal coalition can govern without major problems (as can a single-party government) within a two-party system in which the other party forms the opposition) precisely because there is a broad consensus. Minimal coalitions are understandably more likely to be capable of action than are broad coalitions.

<sup>10</sup>) “...we now take the view that the role of the people is to produce a government, or else an intermediate body which in turn will produce a national executive or government. And we define: the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.” [Schumpeter 1962: 269]

<sup>11</sup>) Popper stresses this second main aspect, saying that democracy is not so much “the government of the people” (who do not in fact govern) but a system in which the people can remove a government in an election, i.e. without violence or bloodshed. The proportional representation electoral system, however, makes it more difficult to remove a government from power. Popper therefore criticises proportional representation as he himself stresses, as one of the very practical results of a new way of asking questions [Popper 1992: 4].

competitive elections which decide whether the current team will be confirmed in office or replaced by another ruling team. In relation to this process, G. Bingham Powell Jr. [1989] spoke of "Citizen Electoral Control".

The majority of political scientists today – including the doyen of American political science Robert Dahl – have implicitly or explicitly accepted Schumpeter's concept of democracy. For the sake of consistency, we should recall what the author of *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* was well aware of and what was radically formulated by another prominent supporter of the contemporary (non-classical) theory of democracy, Karl Popper: that in this case democracy is in no way tied to the principle of proportional representation!<sup>12</sup> In Schumpeter's words, "The principle of democracy then merely means that the reins of government should be handed to those who command more support than do any of the competing individuals or teams. And this in turn seems to assure the standing of the majority system within the logic of the democratic method, although we might still condemn it on grounds that lie outside of that logic" [Schumpeter 1962: 273].

While effectiveness in the socio-economic sense, as Lipset understood it, is linked – if not directly opposed – to legitimacy, *efficiency*-action capacity, as understood by, for example, Bagehot, Duverger, Aron, Sartori, Shugart and Carey, is linked – if not opposed – to *representativeness*. Representativeness may be defined as the ability of elections to articulate and give a voice in the assembly to diverse interests, groups and parties [see e.g. Shugart and Carey 1992: 8]. The English type sacrifices the representativeness of parliament to the need for efficient government, while the continental type sacrifices efficient government to the representativeness of parliament. [Sartori 1968: 469; 1994c: 53; see also Sartori 1995]. Sartori also notes that: "To be sure, in a number of countries one finds a more balanced combination of efficient government and representative representation (for example, the countries having both proportional representation and a relatively limited number of parties, say from three to five). Nonetheless, from the viewpoint of institutional engineering the fact remains that *we cannot build a representational system that maximises at one and the same time the function of functioning and the function of mirroring.*" [Sartori 1968: 469].

This dilemma of efficiency or representativeness was formulated very effectively by Duverger: "A comparative analysis of western regimes reveals an unsurpassable conflict between the expression of opinion and the expression of will. The former requires the presence of many parties in order for every citizen to be able to choose that candidate in an election who is closest to his or her view. It also presupposes the division of seats in parliament in strict proportion to votes cast. The second requires a very different mechanism. For voters to be able to enforce the government which they have selected and for it to be able to function throughout its term in office, there must be few parties, which is able to enforce strict discipline and fall into the bipolar scheme of things. Expressing your opinion means voting for what is desirable. Expressing your will means voting for what is possible. The former is childish, the latter adult, and between the two there is a distance separating the principle of pleasure from that of reality." [Duverger 1988b: 72; cf. also Du-

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<sup>12</sup>) "...before concluding that democracy becomes unworkable if its principle is carried out consistently, it is just as well to ask ourselves whether this principle really implies proportional representation. As a matter of fact it does not. If acceptance of leadership is the true function of the electorate's vote, the case for proportional representation collapses because its premises are no longer binding." [Schumpeter 1962: 272-273]

verger 1982: 247].<sup>13</sup> Jean Tournon reaches the same conclusion with other words: the more a representative government tries to faithfully represent the various shades of opinion and conflicts, the less it is able to resolve them; the more it governs, the less it represents [Tournon 1985: 108]. Elections should aim to select not a copy of the electorate in miniature, but the holders of legitimate authority [Tournon 1985: 119, 108].

G. B. Powell Jr. reached similar conclusions [Powell 1982 and 1989] as did G. Sartori. If a parliamentary system maximises representativeness through an electoral system of proportional representation, governments will have generally shorter terms and voters will be less able to choose an identifiable executive which will be accountable for its results. Popper [1993: 8] stressed that political responsibility is so paralysed in coalition governments that it is not possible to say who is responsible. It is not hard to find examples that bear out this conclusion...

### **Did Arend Lijphart Bring a Theoretical Revolution<sup>14</sup> in Political Science?**

If we are to accept the main thesis of Lijphart's ambitious 1994 article "Democracies: Forms, Performance and Constitutional Engineering",<sup>15</sup> we could conclude that what we

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<sup>13</sup>) *"L'analyse comparative des régimes d'Occident révèle une contradiction insurmontable entre l'expression des opinions et celle des volontés. La première exige que de nombreux partis s'offrent au vote des citoyens afin que chacun puisse choisir un candidat très proche de ses préférences. Elle implique aussi que les sièges attribués soient exactement proportionnés aux suffrages reçus. La seconde a besoin de mécanismes opposés. Pour que les électeurs puissent imposer le gouvernement de leur choix et qu'il ait le moyen d'agir pendant toute la législature, il faut des partis réduits à un petit nombre, enserrés chacun dans une forte discipline et disposés suivant un schéma bipolaire. Exprimer une opinion, c'est voter pour le souhaitable. Exprimer une volonté, c'est voter pour le possible. Le premier comportement est infantile, le second seul est adulte. Entre eux, il y a toute la distance qui sépare le principe de plaisir du principe de réalité."* [Duverger 1988b: 72; see also Duverger 1982: 247].

<sup>14</sup>) In the case of Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific paradigm, on which Lijphart openly leans, it is worth taking Popper's critique into account: "One of Kuhn's theses which can be demonstrated from the history of science is that every science is mature when *only one* basic conviction (one basic current) prevails. This is simply not true. History always shows that from Parmenides and Democritus up to Heisenberg and Schrödinger there have been two parallel lines in the theory of matter, or as Kuhn would have it two paradigms, i.e. a 'continuous theory' and a 'discontinuous theory'. These contrasting theories not only refute but also enrich each other. This is a strong argument against Kuhn's theory". [Popper and Lorenz 1985, 1995: 71]. Is there not a similar situation in the conflict between proportional representation and the majoritarian system, between government by a broad centrist coalition without an available alternative and the alternation of two moderate forces? We should not forget the very interesting and surprisingly *actuel* debate (of 1796!) between Benjamin Constant (*De la force du gouvernement actuel de la France et de la nécessité de s'y rallier* 1796) and his brilliant critic Adrien Lazay-Marnesia (*De la faiblesse d'un gouvernement qui commence, et de la nécessité où il est de se rallier à la majorité nationale* 1796). This "wonderfully modern" (P. Raynaud) discussion is analysed by Maurice Duverger in his noteworthy work *La nostalgie de l'impuissance* [Duverger 1988b: 196-201].

<sup>15</sup>) Lijphart considers, as he writes in the "abstract", that "if its validity is confirmed (...) it has great practical significance for the future of democracy in the world" [Lijphart 1994a: 1]. Lijphart's article was also highly regarded by the editors of the *European Journal of Political Research*, which published it in 1994, as it was one of the subjects considered in their Special Issue on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary in 1997, with selections and comments (see EJPR 31: 193-204, 1997). Manfred G. Schmidt started his commentary on Lijphart's article (Nomination: Arguments in favour of 'Democracies...') with the words: "Arend Lijphart's 'Democracies:



had learnt from Sartori, Duverger and Powell, i.e. that it is necessary to choose between efficiency and representativeness, is only “conventional wisdom” which is not borne out by reality. According to Lijphart, the consensus model of democracy ensures both representativeness and probably effectiveness.

Lijphart only reached this ‘revolutionary’<sup>16</sup> conclusion at the cost of confusion and half-truths. The first and most fundamental of these is an unnoticed shift from the meaning that ‘conventional wisdom’ ascribes to the term efficiency, to the second, i.e. from government action-capacity to socio-economic performance. He is therefore fighting windmills: ‘conventional wisdom’ generally limits itself – very wisely – to contrasting representativeness and efficiency-action capacity! And even if in the past the socio-economic performance of a country as action-capable as Great Britain has not been exceptional, Raymond Aron in his time replied to this that political regimes are only one of the factors of the effectiveness or otherwise of the government of a country [Aron 1965: 159]<sup>17</sup> and that countries where political institutions function well can commit greater mistakes in the economic field than those where political institutions function less well [Aron 1965: 165-166].<sup>18</sup>

Aron put this very well in his lecture “Les institutions politiques de l’Occident dans le monde du XXe siècle”: “In the case of efficiency, this is to be seen from the stability of the government and the consistency of the [governing] majority. This does not rule out mistakes (...), but does rule

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Forms, performance, and constitutional engineering’ is an outstanding contribution to political science.” (EJPR 31: 193, 1997). I would like to thank Professor Manfred G. Schmidt (University of Heidelberg, Germany) for having sent me an offprint from this Special Issue. André Kaiser [1997: 432] writes that: “With the partial exception of Giovanni Sartori [1987: 238-240; 1994c: 69-72], no-one to date has critically discussed the conceptual merits of Lijphart’s proposal.” It was a similar impression that led me to write my earlier article [see Novák 1996].

<sup>16</sup>) It is also worth noting Lijphart’s 1994 article, inspired by Samuel E. Finer’s later writings. There Lijphart claims that the theory that the consensus model (particularly its important elements such as the proportional representation electoral system) is justified not only by the argument of electoral justice, but also by that of effectiveness, and so represents a “theoretical revolution”, as Thomas S. Kuhn understands it [Lijphart 1994b: 623]. The question is why. For Lijphart it is a fundamental attack on a strongly and widely accepted theoretical paradigm, i.e. against the paradigm which says that proportional representation best ensures the representation of minorities, but that the majoritarian system best ensures the effectiveness of the government. The ‘traditional’ argument of better minority representation, which is often put forward in support of the consensus model (and particularly in support of proportional representation) is by no means revolutionary. Arend Lijphart [1994b: 625] did not hesitate to term it so, while Sir Arthur Lewis stresses that multi-ethnic societies need a democracy so that all ethnic groups have proportional access to power and so presumes a proportional representation electoral system [Lewis 1965: 71, 79]. Lijphart himself uses the argument of better minority representation as one of the key criteria for judging all types of democratic state (not only for those which are divided in ethnic, religious, linguistic or other terms, for which this argument is undeniably valid) and even expresses his surprise that S. E. Finer did not use Lewis’ argument to complement his theory! [see Lijphart 1994b: 625-626].

<sup>17</sup>) “...les régimes ne sont qu’un des facteurs de l’efficacité ou de l’inefficacité des gouvernements ou des pays” [Aron 1965: 159].

<sup>18</sup>) “Des pays où les institutions fonctionnent bien (...) ont commis des erreurs de gestion énormes et peut-être des pays où les institutions fonctionnaient normalement moins bien, ont-ils commis moins d’erreurs.” [Aron 1965: 165-166].

out the inability to choose. Democracy (...) is efficient when the legal competition produces a majority, a government, a will; when the law of the majority produces an executive able to act..." [Aron 1960: 13].

Aron's compatriot Duverger expressed this same idea even more clearly: "A decisive Europe (i.e. those European countries which are action-capable – M. N.) is not a Europe in which decisions are good, but one where it is possible to make decisions, whether good or bad, on important affairs and other matters." [Duverger 1988b: 91-92].<sup>19</sup>

Thus a government which can act quickly and make rapid decisions need not always choose the solutions which turn out to be the best in the long term. Lijphart uses this fact to heap praise on the benefits of long and complicated procedures which he claims will help avoid mistakes. There is nothing new in this argument: it has raised its head in the debate between unicameralism or bicameralism in unitary states (as no-one denies the advantages of bicameralism in federal states). Lijphart adopts the arguments of the supporters of bicameralism.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, with reference to Samuel E. Finer [Finer 1975] he emphasises that the alternation of governments of differing orientation which is typical of majoritarian democracies can lead to overly frequent and abrupt changes in economic policy, while effective macro-economic management requires stable, steady policies rather than heavy handed ones [Lijphart 1994a: 12].

It is not difficult to argue against this. In the case of parliaments, their main drawback is that they tend to be slow and drawn-out, cumbersome rather than rash.<sup>21</sup> It can be said that a bad decision taken in time is better than no decision and even than the right decision taken too late.

Finally – and it is important in distinguishing between the consensual and majoritarian models of democracy – the alternation of governments in majoritarian democracies does not generally lead to dramatic shocks or about-turns which could endanger the normal progress of economic policy.<sup>22</sup> It is in fact those democracies which are termed 'ma-

<sup>19</sup>) "L'Europe de la décision n'est pas celle où l'on décide bien. Elle est celle où l'on peut décider, bien ou mal, dans les affaires importantes comme dans les autres" [Duverger 1988b: 91-92]. Like Duverger, another French political scientist and constitutional lawyer, Olivier Duhamel, says: "Il serait évidemment absurde de prétendre que les pays du premier groupe [à système majoritaire] se portent comme un charme et que ceux du second [à système non majoritaire] agonisent. Il n'en demeure pas moins vrai que dans le premier groupe les citoyens décident qui gouverne et pour quoi, tandis que dans le second les électeurs désignent ceux qui choisiront à leur place les gouvernants et les options politiques. Dans le premier cas l'exigence majoritaire permet l'exercice de responsabilité [acomptabilité] politique, dans le second l'éparpillement partisan entretient la confiscation représentative du pouvoir." [Duhamel 1995: 29].

<sup>20</sup>) Bicameralism is also one of the characteristics of his consensus model. Among the "nine (contrasting) characteristics of consensus democracy" Lijphart includes (as the third): "...a bicameral legislature, particularly one in which the two chambers are roughly equal powers and are differently constituted, instead of unicameralism..." [Lijphart 1991b: 486]

<sup>21</sup>) "Dans tous les Parlements, c'est la lenteur et non la précipitation qui constitue le défaut essentiel" [Duverger 1988a: 166].

<sup>22</sup>) Jean-Louis Quermonne, who has made several studies of alternation, maintains that even if alternation does not have a monopoly on democracy, experts see that it is generally more effective than a broad coalition of the centre: "Quoi qu'il en soit, ces différentes variantes de la conjonction des centres tendent à prouver que l'alternance au pouvoir n'a pas le monopole de la démocratie."

majoritarian' that could best lay claim to consensus!<sup>23</sup> Majoritarian democracies function well over the long term in relatively homogeneous societies which are not greatly "polarised" in Sartori's sense, i.e. in which there is little ideological (or other) distance between the relevant parties and so two parties (or two coalitions) with a majority mandate govern in alternation, moderately and close to the political centre. In addition, majoritarian democracies with such a moderate, centripetal mode of functioning with a unimodal distribution of public opinion generally retain this throughout their lives, i.e. polarisation declines rather than increases. As Dominique Pélassy [1992] notes, this is a point on which theory is almost always confirmed by practice.<sup>24</sup>

Only when the ideological distance between the relevant parties is unusually great and the distribution of public opinion is bimodal, will democracy based on a two-party system with a majoritarian electoral system lead to more rather than less intense political conflicts [see Dahl 1965].<sup>25</sup> A bimodal distribution of political opinions generally corresponds to that spectrum of parties that Sartori terms great "ideological distance" between the relevant political parties (or great "polarisation", while a unimodal distribution corresponds rather to small ideological distance (i.e. weak polarisation). As Giacomo Sani and Giovanni Sartori quite rightly noted in their well-known article, "...the best single explanatory variable for stable versus instable, functioning versus non-functioning, successful versus immobile, and easy versus difficult democracy is polarisation..." [Sani and Sartori 1982: 332].

The majoritarian model will only disturb the continuity of economic policy in the case of great ideological distance, i.e. strong polarisation<sup>26</sup> (fortunately rare in democracies). Lijphart is right in saying that in such contexts it is good to distinguish between "short-term stability" and "long-term stability" [Lijphart 1994b: 627]. However in the usual situation, in which ideological distance is relatively small, the economy of a country with a majoritarian democracy is not at risk of long-term instability and there is no fear that the results of political alternation of governments will lead to absurd cycles of nationalisation-privatisation-nationalisation, etc..

It is also symptomatic that Lijphart refers, especially in his recent article [see Lijphart 1994b], to the ideas S. E. Finer began to develop in the mid-1970s. There is no harm in saying that today,

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*Cependant, compte tenu de ses performances, il est normal qu'elle paraisse généralement les surclasser, aux yeux des observateurs avisés*" [Quermonne 1988: 45].

<sup>23</sup>) This is why in his work *The Theory of Democracy Revisited*, Sartori rejected Lijphart's term "consensus democracy": "In his most recent volume, *Democracies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), Lijphart changes 'consociational democracy' into 'consensus democracy'. I shall not follow this renaming since it may convey, if unwittingly, the idea that the Westminster, majoritarian model is not consensus-based" [Sartori 1987: 251, note 42]. Duverger also notes that: "*En vérité, le consensus tourne exactement le dos au centrisme, parce qu'il est la condition nécessaire de l'alternance*" [Duverger 1988b: 42-43].

<sup>24</sup>) "*Quand on rapproche la façon dont les électeurs des grands partis se situent sur l'échelle droite-gauche dans les systèmes européens à tendance bipolaire, on est frappé par le mouvement de concentration au centre qui les affecte*" [Pélassy 1992: 89].

<sup>25</sup>) Here we cannot disregard the fact that increased polarisation can be caused by other factors as well. A majoritarian electoral system and other features of majoritarian democracy are not the only independent variables (even without considering that they may also be dependent variables).

<sup>26</sup>) As will be shown later, no model functions well in a strongly polarised state: the 'consensus' model only functions a little less badly than the majoritarian one.

in the late 1990s, there is a greater consensus in Great Britain (and elsewhere), or a lesser ideological distance, on the basic principles of economic policy than there was in the 1970s and particularly in the early 1980s, even though the political system and its 'majoritarian' characteristics are more pronounced there now than in the past. At the beginning of the 1980s, for example, the two-party system barely functioned and there were open doubts about its future in Great Britain [see Duverger 1981: 12-13; 1982: 285-286]. The whole atmosphere was more ideological and less pragmatic than today.<sup>27</sup>

It can be assumed that this was not a result of the "majoritarian" elements of the British political system (which was in fact suffering from them). It is however true that once ideological polarisation increased *for other reasons*, the remaining majoritarian elements (which were in a state of crisis because they were not adapted to a high level of polarisation) for some time in fact threw more fat on the fire. The reason is clear and has long been recognised by theorists [see Dahl 1965]: in situations of great ideological distance (polarisation) and a bimodal structure of public opinion, majoritarian elements such as the two-party system and the majoritarian electoral system tend not to lessen but to intensify conflicts. Had the ideological polarisation been still greater, it could have been the death-knell of the majoritarian model.

Gordon Tullock [1976: 23] commented in the mid-1970s that: "Thus, one anticipates that the parties in a two-party system would be very close together but that there would be considerable difference between them in a three- (or more)<sup>28</sup> party system. (...) It may be that the present situation [his work was published in 1976] in Britain, in which the Liberal Party has been reviving and regional parties have developed, means that there will be more difference between the two main (and smaller) parties than in the past. Indeed the current internal developments of sharpening differences between wings or groups within both the Conservative and Labour Parties may represent a movement in this direction."

Dominique Pélassy noted that at that time, when some critics blamed the majoritarian system in Great Britain for artificially intensifying conflicts between the parties, in most countries, when elections did not produce a decisive result, there were still those who proclaimed the merits of bipolar clarity [Pélassy 1992: 80-81].

It should not be forgotten that *no model will work satisfactorily in a strongly polarised state*: the 'consensual' model simply works a little less badly than the majoritarian one. As Dahl, for example, explained long ago, when there is strong (but not complete) polarisation, proportional representation and multipartism can help the centre to survive as long as centrist ideas, in the broadest sense of centre-left and centre-right, survive. The moderation of the parties close to the centre can force at least part of the power to work in coalition governments and in opposition and so to at least somewhat weaken antagonistic tendencies. On the other hand it is clear that in a strongly polarised society, under conditions of multipartism and a strictly proportional electoral system, the emergence of extremist parties is almost unavoidable. The increasing clientele of these parties makes it more difficult for the moderate parties (situated around the centre) to create coalitions which are viable and capable of action. The German Weimar Republic – and to a lesser extent Italy – are examples of this. Sartori referred to this as polarised pluralism or extreme multipartism.

Lijphart [1994a: 3], again appealing to Finer [1975] stresses the need for centrist policy-making. Duverger [1988b: 191; 1982: 282-283], on the other hand, has made a

<sup>27</sup>) On the greater consensus and lesser ideological distance in the 1990s, particularly in economic policy, and on its results in contemporary democracy, see Braud [1997: 206].

<sup>28</sup>) Here we are concerned with independent parties. The following does not relate to bipolar multipartism with the alternation of two permanent and relatively homogeneous coalitions.

very useful distinction between *gouverner au centre* (i.e. government **in** the centre) and *gouverner par le centre* (i.e. government **by** the centre), which relates to what he calls the paradox of the centre. When there is a strong centrist party or alliance in power, such a government is generally accused of impotence and slowly wears away the foundations of the regime. When, on the other hand, the centre is broken up by a bipolar system, a right-wing government is in normal circumstances forced to more moderate, i.e. centrist and centripetal policies if it does not want to lose the next elections, and the same applies in the case of a left-wing government. For Duverger, the “paradox of the centre” lies in the fact that the centre is only in power when it does not exist [“*Tel est le paradoxe du centre: il ne gouverne réellement que quand il n'existe pas*”] [Duverger 1982: 282; cf. 1988b: 194].<sup>29</sup> As far as “majoritarian” democracies are concerned, Lijphart should be reminded that in their case centrist policies are in fact normal! And at the same time they allow citizens to choose and sanction their rulers.

Duverger's thesis that “government in the centre” is better than “government by the centre” has been largely confirmed by Reuven Y. Hazan's research into election results in ten Western European countries between 1979 and 1989. Hazan showed that those centre parties which have more than 20% of seats in parliament do not greatly contribute to moderation (as would seem to be the case intuitively) but rather to increased polarisation, i.e. instead the “counter-intuitive” analysis applies [Hazan 1995: 438-439].<sup>30</sup>

Turning to another weak point of Lijphart's thesis: the correlation between certain performances (particularly socio-economic or economic growth, the level of unemployment, the level of inflation, etc.) and the form of government are not very convincing and are not necessarily causal. Richard Rose, who compared the economic performance of democracies with a majoritarian electoral system with the performance of those with a system proportional representation (like G. Bingham Powell Jr., he refers to the latter as “representational”), reached a different conclusion from Lijphart and one which was less in favour of those states with a proportional representation system! In his conclusion he writes: “*there is no consistent link between electoral system and economic performance*”

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<sup>29</sup>) It is a pity that in his noteworthy article (in which from Duverger's works he quotes only from the English translation of Duverger's classic book on political parties), Hazan does not seem to know Duverger's conception of the paradox of the centre and says: “The advocate of the centre's moderating impact is Duverger [sic!], while the champion of its polarizing effect is Sartori.” [Hazan 1995: 424]. Duverger's thesis of the “paradox of the centre” agrees with Sartori's thesis that the existence of centrist parties does not have a centripetal and moderating effect, but rather a centrifugal and polarising one. As both Duverger and Sartori agree that the existence of relevant (particularly if large) centrist parties has an unfortunate effect on the party system; Sartori sees this negative effect in the increase in polarisation, while for Duverger it is primarily in the increasing impotence of the government. Sartori and Duverger differ in their view of what the “basis” of the centre is (Duverger sees the centre not as something which exists in itself, but as something derivative).

<sup>30</sup>) Two conclusions of Hazan's research are as follows: “(1) The presence and growth of centre parties directly and positively impact on the parliamentary strength of extremist parties; but they impact only when the centre is large – defined as more than 20% of the parliamentary seats. (2) The presence and growth of centre parties directly and centrifugally impact on the movement of parties along the left-right continuum; but they impact uniformly for both left and right only on the moderate parties.” [Hazan 1995: 436]

[Rose 1992: 17]. Lijphart himself was forced to admit that his conclusions are only “tentative”.<sup>31</sup>

### **Is Voter Turnout an Excellent Indicator of Democratic Quality?**

There is yet another point in Lijphart's article which has aroused criticism. I will limit myself here to only a couple of examples. Lijphart sees voter turnout as “an excellent indicator of democratic quality because it shows the extent to which citizens are actually interested in being represented” [Lijphart 1994a: 4]. He calculates the mean voting participation of countries with proportional representation as 84.5%, while in countries with majoritarian electoral systems it is only 75.3%, i.e. 9% less than in the former [Lijphart 1994a: 6-7; see also Lijphart 1997: 7-9].

It should be noted that Lijphart does not include Switzerland (known for its exceptionally high level of non-participation) among those countries with proportional representation, even though he himself says that “Switzerland comes closest to the ideal type of consensus democracy”! [Lijphart 1994a: 2]. His justification for excluding Switzerland is that it does not have a parliamentary government. And when slightly later in his article Lijphart compares majoritarian and consensus democracies and is forced to include Switzerland in his considerations, he tries to present it (together with the USA) as one of two exceptional “deviant cases”, which can probably be explained away by the frequency of elections and the multitude of electoral choices [Lijphart 1994a: 10]. In contrast with this it should be noted that abstentionism is increasing in the old European and American democracies in which voting is not compulsory and that the Swiss and American cases are in fact only the tip of the iceberg [see Hermet 1996: 90, 1989: 70-75]. Jan-Erik Lane and Swante Ersson, who recently studied the development of voter turnout in 18 western European countries since 1980, also discovered a long-run decline: the average participation rate was 81.5% in 1980-84, 80.1% in 1985-89, 79.4% in 1990-94, 74.9% in 1995-96 [Lane and Ersson 1997: 183-184].

Some scholars, including the French political scientists Nonna Mayer and Pascal Perrineau [Mayer and Perrineau 1992: 37] even see – probably rightly – one of the causes of the very low level of participation in Switzerland as the absence of alternation in government.<sup>32</sup> Since 1959 (!), when the socialists became a permanent part of the federal executive, all relevant political parties on the federal level have been represented in the seven-member Swiss government (the Federal Council), a situation which H. Kerr [1987: 124] called an “all-party regime”. There are still the same parties and their proportions have not changed since 1959 (2 Radical Democrats [PRD], 2 Christian Democrats [PDC], 2 Socialists [PDC], 1 Agrarian [UDC]). The Swiss call this the “magic formula” – and yet it is known that such a broad coalition is one of the key features of Lijphart's consensual model of democracy!

By this logic high electoral participation can exist where there are only two “camps” which are divided by a great ideological distance.<sup>33</sup> But this – very negative – situation (bipolarity plus

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<sup>31</sup>) “My conclusion, in the absence of definitive evidence based on more broadly comparative research on democratic institutions, has to be tentative” [Lijphart 1994a: 15].

<sup>32</sup>) In the case of the USA, a low electoral turnout is often explained as a result of “alternation without a [real] alternative”, or in other words of the “*consensus à l'américaine*” [see Mény 1978: 11; Toinet 1976: 927; Braud 1997: 222].

<sup>33</sup>) “*Quand l'éventail des choix politiques est ouvert et que les pôles de droite et de gauche du système partisan représentent véritablement deux pôles opposés, le système a de la polarité (...) Cette polarité, par la clarté des alternatives qu'elle propose, encourage la participation. (...) En Suisse, où depuis 1959 les quatre grands partis (parti radical, parti socialiste, parti démocrate-chrétien, union démocratique du centre) participent ensemble à l'exécutif de la Confédération, la polarisation du système de parti est quasi inexistante et la participation électorale une des plus faibles du monde occidental*” [Mayer and Perrineau 1992: 37].

polarisation) which should bring about increasing electoral participation is miles away from what Lijphart calls for (nor is it viable in the long term since, as was mentioned above, bipolar systems cannot function well when there is great ideological distance).<sup>34</sup>

In the Swiss situation, when there is a sensitive subject that arouses strong emotions (e.g. xenophobic initiatives of the nationalist far right), participation rises markedly. While average participation in the thirty referenda and popular initiatives between 1965 and 1973 was only 42.4%, with a maximum of 74.7% in the vote on the initiative "*contre l'emprise étrangère*" (against undue foreign influence) in June 1970, and a minimum of 26.7% (!) for the vote on the stabilisation of the construction market and the support of the currency in June 1972 [Sidjanski 1975: 17]. In later times, for example, the popular initiative for the abolition of the army, which aroused passionate disputes and strongly polarised the population, enjoyed a level of participation much above the average (69.2%).<sup>35</sup>

The situation with elections is similar. The first parliamentary elections after the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia, which took place in June 1990, enjoyed exceptionally high participation (more than 96%). They were seen basically as a choice between the former communist regime and liberal democracy. It is difficult to offer this as a model for a stabilised democracy to copy... The excellent Swedish analyst of political participation, Herbert Tingsten, noted that in various countries such as Germany and Austria, an extremely high vote was achieved just at the point when their democracies began to break down [Tingsten 1937: 225-226].

It is generally clear that one of the ways of increasing participation is to increase ideological distance (polarisation) and reduce consensus, which can hardly be seen as desirable. A whole range of serious studies, particularly in the period of the collapse of democracies in Europe between the two World Wars, confirms this conclusion.<sup>36</sup> It is also indisputable that one of the many reasons (although by no means the only one) for electoral abstention is people's satisfaction with the general state of affairs, so that they do not see any need to go to the urns [see e.g. Berelson, Lazarsfeld et al. 1954: 322; Almond and Verba 1965: 339, 347]. Philippe Braud recently commented that a certain scepticism in relation to the traditional forms of political participation can be a sign of greater civic maturity [Braud 1997: 223] and a similar idea was put forward by Ronald Inglehart [1990].

It would of course be cynical if the low participation in elections in the old 'consolidated' democracies was a reason for rejoicing, but we should accept that a low level of participation has not always one and the same significance. It need not even always indicate something negative (just as a high level need not necessarily be a positive sign). Seymour Martin Lipset explained this very convincingly in his still highly regarded classic work *Political Man* (1960) and his conclusion is worth quoting. "The evidence confirms Tingsten's thesis that a sudden increase in the size of the voting electorate probably reflects tension and serious governmental malfunctioning and also introduces as voters individuals whose social attitudes are unhealthy from the point of view of the requirements of the democratic system. On the other hand, a high vote is not necessarily bad. (...) To the extent that the lower strata have been brought into the electoral process gradually (through increased organisation, an upgrading of the educational system, and growth in their un-

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<sup>34</sup>) Daniel-Louis Seiler commented, however, that it is not possible to associate bipolarity exclusively with low polarisation or multi-polarity only with strong polarisation: "*Il existe [aussi] des systèmes bipolaires, plus ou moins fortement bipolarisés; ainsi l'Autriche de la 1ère République (...) De même on aperçoit facilement des exemples de systèmes multipolaires dénués de toute polarisation: ainsi la Norvège, où la défense de la périphérie constitue un pôle*" [Seiler 1982: 129].

<sup>35</sup>) The most recent information can be found in [Papadopoulos 1994, Kriesi 1993].

<sup>36</sup>) See Lipset [1981: 227-229], who refers to authors such as H. Tingsten, Francis G. Wilson, W. H. Morris Jones, D. N. Hogan, Harold F. Gosnell, W. B. Munro, David Riesman.

derstanding of the relevance of government action to their interests), increased participation is undoubtedly a good thing for democracy. (...) Thus *neither high nor low rates of participation and voting are in themselves good or bad for democracy*; the extent and nature of that participation reflect other factors which determine far more decisively the system's chances to develop or survive" [Lipset 1981: 229]. In such circumstances it is clear that the statement that voter turnout is "an excellent indicator of democratic quality" [Lijphart 1994a: 4] is unsustainable.

### **Has Lijphart Fallen into a Pre-Aristotelian Approach?**

Lijphart constantly proclaims the superiority of consensus democracy (over majoritarian democracy) in questions of the representation of minorities, but this is in fact unnecessarily gilding the lily. Nobody denies that consociational elements of the political system are more appropriate to a society divided into various ethnic, linguistic, religious and other subculture.<sup>37</sup>

This brings us to the crucial point in evaluating Lijphart's thesis. In the fourth book of his *Politics*, Aristotle already put forward the idea that it is not so much (or at least not only) a case of looking for the best government of all, for the best regime as such, but rather for a regime which suits the given conditions. In Lijphart's case, after suggesting a distinction between consensus and majoritarian forms of democracy, he seeks to promote the former as the better form, superior – according to almost all criteria – to the majoritarian model.<sup>38</sup> This stance leads him to suggest that if we are to decide between these two models (as is the case in countries in the process of democratisation), we should fa-

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<sup>37</sup>) Stein Rokkan demonstrates this very clearly on the basis of the system of proportional representation, as an important element of consociational democracy: "It was no accident that the earliest moves toward proportional representation (...) came in the ethnically most heterogeneous European countries: Denmark in 1855; the Swiss cantons in 1891; Belgium in 1899; Moravia in 1905; Finland in 1906. In linguistically and religiously divided societies majority elections could clearly threaten the continued existence of the political system" [Rokkan 1970: 157]. We should however remember that in some circumstances a majoritarian electoral system can work to the benefit of ethnic, linguistic or religious minorities when these are concentrated in certain regions [see Duverger 1981: 401]. Furthermore, if we contrast, as is usual, proportional representation and majoritarian electoral systems, we should not lose sight of the crucial importance of constituency magnitude, as demonstrated by Douglas W. Rae [1971], Rein Taagepera and Matthew S. Shugart [1989] and even Lijphart himself with his collaborators [Lijphart 1994c].

<sup>38</sup>) Lijphart's position on this has developed. Initially he was satisfied with a more modest and reasonable position, in his own words: "The conventional wisdom has long been widely accepted without adequate empirical examination (...). In fact, I have committed this error myself. (...) I argued that power-sharing was the best kind of democracy that deeply divided countries could attain, but I admitted – far too readily! – that it was necessarily less effective and less efficient than majoritarian forms of democracy" [Lijphart 1994a: 3]. Sartori is therefore right when he considers Lijphart's conception of "consociational democracy" to be an important contribution to our understanding of democracy, but rejects absolutely his later attempt to create a "grand theory" of the superiority of "consensus democracy": "Lijphart was absolutely right in holding that a democracy could work even under adverse conditions (especially a fragmented political culture) by having recourse to non-majoritarian, consociational practices; and his consociational democracy construct was a perceptive and important addition to our understanding of democratic governance. Thereafter, however, Lijphart has blown up these premises into a 'grand theory' of a superior form of democracy: consensus democracy. And while I do follow the initial Lijphart, I cannot follow him that far." [Sartori 1994c: 70]



vour the consensus model. As has been shown above, Lijphart sees this not just as better in terms of representation and protection of minorities, but also as more effective.

The fact that he uses the term effectiveness in the sense of socio-economic performance does however have two unfortunate results: (1) in contrast with what he himself declares, he has not been successful in casting doubt on 'traditional' wisdom because it has something else to set up against representativeness, i.e. efficiency in terms of action-capacity, and (2) his thesis falls into difficulties since there is not necessarily a causal relation between the various models of democracy and socio-economic effectiveness.

Lijphart could be content with arguments which are far from insignificant and proclaim, for example, that consociational characteristics are appropriate in many conditions, with the exception of relatively homogeneous countries and where ideological distance is not too great [see Sartori 1987: 240; Dahl 1989: 161-162].<sup>39</sup> As his more recent texts unfortunately show, however – particularly his article "Democracies: Forms, Performance and Constitutional Engineering" – he is not content with this and has moved ever closer to a pre-Aristotelian approach, comparing models as if one of them is to be recommended as the best for all countries beginning the process of democratisation [see Lijphart 1994a: 12-15].

I myself would prefer a different approach. It would be better to ask in what conditions the 'consensus' model is best suited, or more specifically, in what circumstances is there no real choice as it is the only realistic possibility for preserving democracy.<sup>40</sup> And we should also ask what type of states could instead adopt majoritarian elements without any great difficulties (particularly the majoritarian electoral system or a more general electoral system with a clear majoritarian effect).<sup>41</sup>

Only then could we really ask whether the consensus model would not also be better in those countries whose relative homogeneity and small ideological distance allow them to adopt elements of the majoritarian model.<sup>42</sup> But we should be careful that here too we do not use – as does Lijphart – always one and the same criterion to evaluate all countries, or at least that all criteria do not have the same weight, the same importance. Comparisons between countries whose sociological characteristics (homogeneity or segmentation, etc.) place them closer to one 'model'<sup>43</sup> or the other should be treated differ-

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<sup>39</sup>) We should not however be too impressed by Lijphart's consensus model. As will be shown, it is only at first sight that the majority of 'consolidated' western democracies follow the consensus rather than the majoritarian model.

<sup>40</sup>) As seems to be the case in countries with major linguistic, religious or ethnic divisions, such as Belgium. In these cases we can turn to Raymond Aron: "*Quand un pays est trop divisé sur le régime le meilleur ou sur ce qu'il convient de faire dans une situation donnée, mieux vaut souvent d'accepter une demi-paralysie*" [Aron 1965: 231].

<sup>41</sup>) As is well-known, even with proportional representation there can be a marked majoritarian effect, as for example when constituencies are small (with no more than five seats for each constituency).

<sup>42</sup>) If we really wanted to overturn the 'conventional wisdom', we should not do as Lijphart did when he tried to surreptitiously replace efficiency-action capacity (which the traditional concept uses) with something else, i.e. effectiveness-socio-economic performance.

<sup>43</sup>) The terms 'majoritarian democracy' and 'consensus democracy' are only ideal-types (to use Max Weber's terminology), which real political systems can more or less approximate: "A first observation is that I would definitely stress the ideal-type, indeed the polar-type, nature of the

ently. A criterion which is important or even decisive for a highly segmented country, may well be insignificant for relatively homogeneous one, and *vice versa*. In countries which are relatively homogeneous in ethnic, linguistic and religious terms, for example, the criterion of better representation for ethnic or other minorities loses much of its importance.

For an example of the use of differing criteria in different circumstances we can look to Raymond Boudon, who in his work *L'Idéologie ou l'origine des idées reçues* [Boudon 1986: 222-225] notes that in many agrarian societies, particularly in African and Vietnamese villages at the beginning of the 20th century, decisions in village meetings were often made on the basis not of a simple or even a qualified majority, but of unanimity. Observers noticed that this rule of unanimous decisions almost always meant endless discussion. As could be expected from Boudon, he was not satisfied with a culturalist interpretation of this fact but sought a rational explanation.<sup>44</sup> Briefly, he argues that these agrarian societies function in a system that is close to a subsistence economy, where simple existence is important and there is a very strong interdependence between the members of the collective, so that an initiative by one member can very easily have a serious effect on the life of another member. Thus everyone has a reason to have the power of veto so that the meeting can take a unanimous collective decision, rather than any other way of transforming individual opinions in collective decision-making. What then is the cost of this process?<sup>45</sup>

It is true that the rule of unanimity leads to very long discussions, but in such societies time is relatively cheap: people's contribution to the economy takes up only a small part of their time and they can devote much of what remains to the functioning of the 'political system'. In other words, in traditional agrarian societies there is a wealth of time and a close interdependence between the members of the society. In modern societies time is more valuable and interdependence between the members of the society is much less. While in traditional agrarian societies the rule of unanimity satisfactorily fulfils the function of changing individual opinions into collective decisions, in modern society the members of a collectivity tend to submit to a simple majority decision. In modern society the unanimity rule would be dysfunctional, just as majority rule would be dysfunctional in traditional agrarian communities [Boudon 1986: 225].

It is paradoxical that Lijphart suggests a similar model<sup>46</sup> for contemporary society to that which Boudon finds appropriate for traditional agrarian societies! In his article on democracy quoted above, Lijphart refers to Rupert Emerson and Raul S. Maglapus, who noted that non-European (African and Asian) nations of the Third World have consensual rather than majoritarian traditions [see Lijphart 1994a: 14-15]. But instead of providing a logical explanation as to why the consensus model is particularly suited to traditional agrarian countries (and for highly polarised or segmented societies, whether traditional or modern), Lijphart simply states that "...at the deeper level of political culture, the prevalent orientations tend to be more consensual than majoritarian in most areas of the world" [Lijphart 1994a: 14].

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distinction between majoritarian and consociational democracy. Lijphart stresses, instead, the empirical and empirically extracted nature of his types and, by so doing, is in danger of overstating his case. The contrast is empirically overdrawn, to begin with, in that no real-world democracy abides by absolute majority rule" [Sartori 1987: 239].

<sup>44</sup>) Raymond Boudon refers to the work of Samuel L. Popkin [1979].

<sup>45</sup>) On the common question of the two types of cost of collective decision-making see Buchanan and Tullock [1967].

<sup>46</sup>) It should be stressed that these are similar but by no means identical: the principle of 'unanimity' goes further than (although with the same logic as) that of 'consensus'.

### **Are 'Consensual Characteristics' More Common in Democracies than 'Majoritarian Characteristics'?**

One's initial impression could be that the great majority of 'consolidated' western democracies are closer to the consensus model than the majoritarian one. It is not true that such 'consensual' characteristics as proportional representation, multipartism and bicameralism are more frequent than their counterparts in the majoritarian model, i.e. majoritarian electoral systems, two-party systems and unicameralism? When the question is considered in somewhat more depth, however, the facts turn out to be somewhat different.

Not only does proportional representation rarely appear in an (almost) pure form, but in some cases (e.g. Greece, Spain) the officially proportional electoral system in fact has a clear majoritarian effect. For example, the index of disproportionality for Spain, as calculated by Richard Rose [1984: 75], is 84, which is higher than for most countries with a majoritarian electoral system, including Great Britain! Richard Rose's calculations showed only two countries with majoritarian electoral systems which were even more disproportionate than Spain: New Zealand (index of disproportionality 80) and France (index 79).

In the case of unicameralism and bicameralism, it should not be forgotten that this is only relevant in the case of unitary states, as no-one opposes the idea of American-style bicameralism for federal states. Taking only unitary states into account in comparing the effects of uni- and bicameralism, the prevalence of bicameralism is greatly reduced. In addition, bicameralism in the strict sense of the word implies – as Lijphart himself says – that both chambers (upper and lower houses) have approximately the same level of competence. In some countries in which there is formally a bicameral parliament, the upper house has far less power (as for example in Great Britain), and so this strict criterion of bicameralism does not apply.

As for party systems, multipartism is of course far more widespread than two-party systems. Bipolar multipartism as Duverger and Sartori, among others, understand it, seems to be more compatible with the 'majoritarian' logic, just like the two-party system!

As Norman Schofield [1995] recently showed, looking only at multi-party countries (i.e. excluding countries with two-party systems from his analysis), the most frequent situations in Western European democracies are (1) various forms of minimal winning coalitions, including so-called minimal connected winning coalitions, and (2) minority governments. It is probably not necessary to show how minimal winning coalitions are closer to 'majoritarian' logic than to the 'consensual' one. It is worth mentioning however that minority governments are even closer to the 'majoritarian' logic than are minimal winning coalitions, which is not in fact the paradox it at first seems.

This seems to bring us to the Achilles heel of Lijphart's consensual model: a broad coalition in the sense that Lijphart's model calls for (i.e. all relevant parties should have at least approximately proportional representation in the government)<sup>47</sup> has only been in practice for any real length of time in Switzerland (since 1959). It did work in Colombia but only temporarily (for four consecutive parliamentary terms). Even in Austria, where such a coalition existed after the Second World War, there has now long been what is known as the 'grand coalition' (a coalition of Social Democrats and the Popular Party),

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<sup>47</sup>) On the major disadvantages of such broad coalitions see Duverger [1988b: 192] and Braud [1997: 180].

which is in fact only one of the types of minimal winning coalitions, that incorporating the least number of parties, as Leiserson understands it. It is easy to understand why in recent decades in Austria there has only exceptionally been a different type of minimal winning coalition, i.e. one with the least number of parliamentary seats, as Riker<sup>48</sup> understands it. This too corresponds to the 'majoritarian' logic rather than the 'consensual' one: the third party, Heider's FPÖ is seen as an extreme party and so neither of the two moderate parties can go into coalition with it. Basically, it is not possible to say that the overwhelming majority of well-established democracies are closer to the consensual model than to the majoritarian one.

### **Does 'Conventional Wisdom' Only Apply to Parliamentary Systems?**

While Lijphart tries to show that consensual democracies are superior in terms not only of representativeness, but also of effectiveness, Matthew Soberg Shugart and John M. Carey in their significant recent work [see Shugart and Carey 1992] put forward a different thesis which is interesting. The traditional idea that it is necessary to choose between representativeness and efficiency<sup>49</sup> may apply for parliamentary systems, but not for systems with a directly-elected president.<sup>50</sup> Briefly summarising their arguments, in parliamentary government there is only one body which is directly elected, i.e. the parliament: "With only one agent of the electorate, it is not feasible to have both efficient and representative elections in the same system" [Shugart and Carey 1992: 8]. In systems, in which the president (or more usually the leader of the executive) is directly elected, there are two such bodies, the parliament and the president, and Shugart and Carey consider that it is thus possible to maximise two aims at one and the same time, i.e. both efficiency and representativeness.

Shugart and Carey are clear as to their preference: a directly elected president (or more usually the head of the executive) which allows the voters to identify with their executive (identifiability) which can then be responsible for its results (accountability), then a very representative parliament (which usually implies a proportional voting system). One of the major points of Shugart and Carey's work is the rich comparative analysis of systems in which the president is directly elected, but their thesis on the possibility of maximising both representativeness and efficiency is less plausible.<sup>51</sup>

It would not be right to use Scott Mainwaring's important article [1993] to rebut Shugart and Carey's conclusions. Mainwaring argues that the combination of a presidential regime with multipartism (remembering that according 'Duverger's laws' multipart-

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<sup>48</sup>) On the various types of minimal winning coalitions see my recent guide [Novák 1997a: 185-189].

<sup>49</sup>) Unlike Lijphart, Shugart and Carey contrast representativeness with efficiency-action capacity, thus respecting 'conventional wisdom'.

<sup>50</sup>) This argument could also be used for those parliamentary regimes in which the premier (Prime Minister) is directly elected. To date this is the case only in Israel, where it was introduced in 1992 and first used in 1996. Duverger [1996: 117-118], who recommended this direct election of the premier (Prime Minister) in France in 1956, recently suggested defining this form of parliamentary system as "semi-parlementaire" (semi-parliamentary), as with the earlier recognition of the French 5th Republic as "semi-présidentiel" (semi-presidential).

<sup>51</sup>) For a very well-considered and accurate evaluation of Shugart and Carey's important work see the review by Jean Blondel [1993: 415-416].

tism is linked with proportional representation) is very negative for the stability of democracy. It should be stressed that a political system in which the head of the executive (whether president or premier) is directly elected and in which the legislature is elected by proportional representation does not allow both representativeness and efficiency to be maximised.

Certain constitutional elements such as proportional representation which favour representativeness can be in conflict with such elements as the direct election of the head of the executive which favour efficiency. A driver who directs one horse to the left and the second to the right, still cannot go left and right at the same time. In the best case he will go in an intermediate direction, e.g. directly ahead, in the worse the carriage will be torn between two opposing pressures.

It could be *à la rigueur* to find an analogous constitutional configuration of a small number of parties in parliamentarianism with a proportional election system. Sartori's conclusion as to such a configuration could also apply for such a constitutional design as Shugart and Carey suggest: it could eventually produce a more satisfying balance between efficiency and representativeness but would not produce a constitutional arrangement that would maximise both political aims at the same time.

#### **Conclusion: On the Prospects of Constitutional Engineering<sup>52</sup> Not Only in East Central Europe**

In conclusion I would like to recapitulate, recalling some simple ideas which have unfortunately been rather forgotten in recent times and try to apply some of the theses considered to three newly democratic countries of East Central Europe.

The first and main source of inspiration should be Sartori's attempt to clarify the relevant concepts [see e.g. Sartori 1970, 1994a, 1994b]. Using terms which have various meanings can lead to confusion.<sup>53</sup> In the case of the term efficiency, a distinction has been suggested between the two main meanings of the term: efficiency-action capacity and effectiveness-socio-economic performance.<sup>54</sup>

In order that democracy can function satisfactorily, it requires both effectiveness-socioeconomic performance and efficiency-action capacity. As far as effectiveness is concerned it seems that there is no definite relation between the various constitutional choices (particularly electoral systems) and socio-economic performance (although correlations need not necessarily be causal). Expecting the move from a majoritarian electoral system to proportional representation or from unicameralism to bicameralism to improve economic performance is illusory at best.

The case of efficiency-action capacity is somewhat different. The adjustment of the existing electoral system (e.g. a marked reduction of the size of constituencies and a corresponding increase in their number) or the replacement of one electoral system by an-

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<sup>52</sup>) On constitutional engineering see principally Sartori [1994c and 1996].

<sup>53</sup>) It was Sartori [1994c: 69-73] who pointed out the importance of the terminological problem relating to Lijphart's later work and his 'grand theory' of the superiority of consensus democracy over majoritarian democracy.

<sup>54</sup>) As to the term collective effectiveness, which Dahl sometimes uses, this can be replaced by the importance which decision-making can have in a democratic unit, which depends primarily on the dimension and the jurisdiction of the government of the unit.

other (e.g. a move from proportional representation to a majoritarian electoral system) can in many cases increase the efficiency-action capacity of the government.

It is clear that such increased action capacity is especially important in the radical transformation in the economic field, such as in the post-communist countries of East Central Europe. This presumes at least a minimal consensus (or in other words a relatively low level of polarisation) and a relatively homogeneous state. Hungary, a fairly homogeneous country, adopted a largely majoritarian electoral system [see Lijphart 1992b], and could well provide a model for the Czech Republic and Poland, also relatively homogeneous countries. The experience of these three countries which (together with Slovenia) are considered to be the best students of both political democracy and market economy among the former communist countries, and which (unlike Slovenia) are under consideration for membership of both NATO and the European Union, is of particular interest, especially from the point of view of the effects of the electoral system.<sup>55</sup>

In the post-communist countries of East Central Europe the party system is just taking shape and a strictly proportional voting system may reinforce tendencies to fragmentation and complicate government stability. The tendency towards party fragmentation is as strong as it was during the first two legislative elections and is evident not only during elections but also in the appearance of new parliamentary groups during the parliamentary term. Except in Hungary, where the main parties were formed earlier than in the other countries (even before 1989), the post-communist countries of East Central Europe have now had their third free parliamentary elections and are so emerging as stable party systems. The effects of the five-percent threshold have changed greatly over time, as can be seen in the Czech Lands, where the threshold has been in force since the first free elections in 1990.<sup>56</sup>

Poland initially had a strictly proportional system which resulted in 29 (!) parties gaining seats in the lower house of parliament (the Sejm), which is perhaps a 'world record'. The strongest of the parties had only 12% of votes. Poland could then have followed the example of Hungary and replaced the proportional system with a largely majoritarian electoral system, or a more general system with a largely majoritarian effect. It did not however go so far and opted instead to follow Czechoslovakia (and its successor states) and introduce a quorum (5% for individuals and 8% for coalitions). In addition Poland adopted the D'Hondt system of seat allocation for smaller constituencies (this system tends to favour large parties and is thus somewhat less proportional than the Hare-Niemeyer system of seat allocation which Poland had abandoned).

In Czechoslovakia (and its successor states) the five-percent threshold has been in force from the outset, i.e. since the first legislative elections in 1990. In the first (and largely also the second) democratic elections this voting quorum had a marked majoritarian effect as the voters still gave a large proportion of their votes to very small parties. Those who were not successful in the elections did not gain seats in parliament, and those votes were divided between those few parties which got over the five-percent threshold. The first legislative elections with the five-percent threshold in Poland in 1993 represented an extreme case, producing an unusually large disproportion: 9 of the 15 party lists did not gain places in the lower house of parliament (the Sejm), 35% (!) of votes were 'lost' and were 'redistributed'. The coalition of Kwasniewski's Democratic Left

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<sup>55</sup>) On this subject, see the *International Political Science Review*, vol. 18, no. 4, October 1997. Issue title: "Elections and Parliaments in Post-Communist East Central Europe." Issue editor was Jerzy J. Wiatr and other authors of articles included János Simon, Stanislaw Gebethner, David M. Olson, Attila Ágh and Jana Reschová.

<sup>56</sup>) A similar tendency could be noted in Germany in the 1950s, and the objection that its electoral system was 'mixed' is of little value. Specialists know that Germany has a basically 'personalised' system of proportional representation.

Alliance (SDL) and the Peasant Party (PSL) thus required only 36% of voters to gain 66% of parliamentary seats. In the second legislative elections with the five-percent threshold (in 1997) the level of disproportionality fell but was still considerable. The Polish President Kwasniewski recently noted that in 1997 his post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) gained a higher proportion of the vote than in 1993 (27% compared with only 20% in 1993). Even so it lost the 1997 elections whereas in 1993 it had won a resounding victory. In 1997 the elections were won by Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS), which gained 34% of votes and 44% of seats.

The third parliamentary elections with the five-percent threshold in the Czech Republic were held in 1996 and voters had already had time to get used to this threshold (what Duverger terms the "psychological effect"): they therefore chose not to vote for parties which had no chance of entering parliament, which greatly increased the level of proportionality. In 1992 the centre-right coalition (ODS-KDS, ODA, KDU-CSL) gained an absolute majority (52.5%) of seats with only 42% of the vote. In those elections 19% of votes were 'lost' (and redistributed). In the third Czech legislative elections in 1996, however, only 11% of votes were 'lost' and so 44% of the vote was not enough for these three parties (ODS,<sup>57</sup> ODA, KDU-CSL) to gain an absolute majority in parliament (they held only 49.5% of seats). They were thus forced to form a minority government and the results are clear: the stability of the government is endangered and there is a high risk of paralysis and impotence [see Novák 1997b: 178-179].

The question is now whether a similar fate awaits Poland in its third legislative elections with the five-percent threshold. In any case, it is easy to agree with Jerzy Wiatr when he says that "The institutional instability of Polish parliamentarism has been contrasted with a highly stable evolution of parliamentarism in Hungary (...), indicating that it is not the novelty of parliamentary institutions as such or the immaturity of the young democracy that explains the Polish paradox, but rather the specific history of institution-building in Poland since 1989" [Wiatr 1997: 444].

Speaking more generally, it would be a pity if the significance of political efficiency-energy capacity were underestimated in the name of a one-sided view and in comparison with other aims of absolute representativeness. As has been shown, political efficiency is basic to democracy as we know it today. The concept of efficiency is closely linked with the theory of democracy put forward by Schumpeter and subsequently adopted by the majority of contemporary political scientists. This question has both theoretical and practical importance; efficiency should only be abandoned in exceptional circumstances (when the very survival of democracy is at stake).

As to the relation between representativeness and efficiency-action capacity, neither a parliamentary nor a presidential system is, unfortunately, able to maximise both at the one and the same time. Some political scientists claim to have found a constitutional choice which does maximise both aims (representativeness and efficiency) but their arguments are less than convincing. In addition, the actual circumstances must be taken into account: choices which are valid in one situation will not necessarily be appropriate in other circumstances.<sup>58</sup> No 'model', either majoritarian or consensual, suits all democratic (or democratising) countries.

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<sup>57</sup>) The KDS mini-party, which contested the 1992 legislative elections in a pre-election coalition with ODS, later joined with ODS before the next elections.

<sup>58</sup>) This is the position of Robert Dahl: "Whether people committed to the democratic process find it reasonable to adopt majority rule for all collective decision, impose limits on majority rule, or move toward consensual arrangement therefore depends in part on the conditions under which they expect collective decisions will be made. If and as these conditions change, arrangements judged suitable in previous circumstances may be modified in one direction or another – toward stricter majoritarianism or toward greater non-majoritarianism" [Dahl 1989: 161].

It is particularly inappropriate to recommend the so-called consensual model (and such of its elements as a strictly proportional electoral system) for those countries in the process of democratisation which are relatively homogeneous and are not highly polarised. Strict proportional representation favours serious fragmentation and polarisation, clears the way for parties opposed to the system as such (anti-system parties), inhibits the formation of a viable party system, places strains on government stability and can lead to impotence and paralysis.

*Translated by April Retter*

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